



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE PROPOSES RULE TO IMPROVE SEA TURTLE BYCATCH MONITORING

To assist in the recovery of sea turtle populations, NOAA Fisheries Service is proposing a rule under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) to require fishing vessels, in certain cases, operating in state and federal waters of the U.S. to take an observer on board. The new rule would help the agency better evaluate fishing interactions with sea turtles. The rule would apply to fishing vessels operating in both state and federal waters, from the coast out to 200 miles offshore.

"We're proposing this rule to increase our ability to protect sea turtles and restore their populations," said Bill Hogarth, director of NOAA Fisheries Service. "Observers provide key scientific facts we need to minimize bycatch in our commercial fisheries."

Current regulations under the Endangered Species Act allow NOAA Fisheries Service to place observers on vessels on a short-term basis in response to a determination that an emergency event has occurred, such as a mass sea turtle stranding. However, these temporary observer requirements do not enable the agency to collect comprehensive information on sea turtles and fishing activities. This rule would allow NOAA Fisheries Service to identify potential sea turtle interaction problems, before they reach crisis levels that may call for more stringent management measures.

Under this rule, each year NOAA Fisheries Service would publish in the Federal Register a draft and final determination of fisheries it intends to monitor for sea turtle interactions. The determination would be based on the best available scientific, commercial, or other information regarding sea turtle-fishery interactions, including sea turtle distribution or fishing gear characteristics.

The proposed rule can be found online (*see Web link below*). The agency will accept public comments on the proposal until February 20, 2007. Comments may be addressed to:

Chief, Marine Mammal and Turtle Division
Office of Protected Resources
NOAA Fisheries Service
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Incidental take caused by fishing gear can result in turtle mortality or injury, and is one of the leading threats to sea turtles.

All sea turtle species are listed as either endangered or threatened. This proposed regulation would enable NOAA Fisheries Service to adequately document sea turtle takes in commercial fisheries, to evaluate existing measures to reduce sea turtle

takes, and to determine whether there is a need for new or additional measures to reduce sea turtle takes.

In 2007 the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, celebrates 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

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On the Web:

Proposed Observer Rule: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/species/turtles/regulations.htm>

NOAA Fisheries Service: www.nmfs.noaa.gov

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